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AN EXPERIMENT IN HOME EDUCATION

BY

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AN EXPERIMENT IN HOME EDUCATION

DURING the years 1911 and 1912, through much alternation of theory and experience, we groped our way into a plan of home-making, that seemed to us to possess a high order of educational and economic value. In April, 1912, we commenced an experimental test of our plan. As time has passed, and the success of our experiment has become apparent, we have talked about it with leading educators and economists. Recently there have been references to it in the public press, and we have received many inquiries. We are therefore stating briefly in this paper the purpose of our home experiment, and its results to the present time.

Educational Advantages of the Home

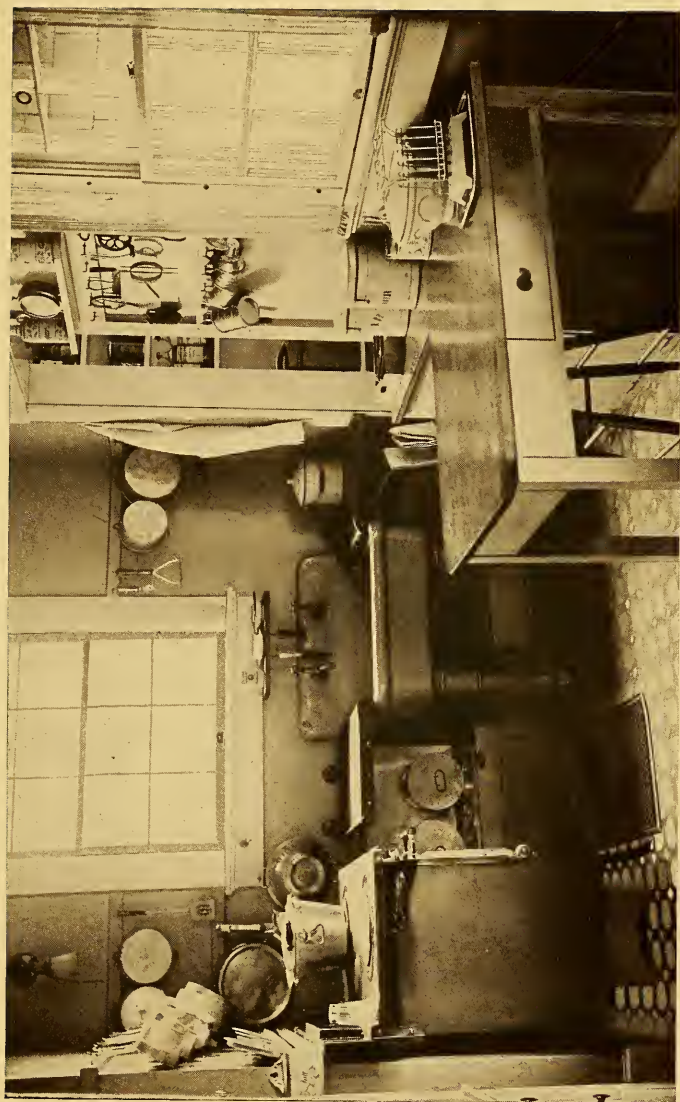
Many thinkers have recognized that in certain respects the home has a natural educational advantage over the school, and that in order to attain the best results the home, as well as the school, must play its part.

One educational advantage of the home is in the cultivation of a habit of industry. The school with its trained instructors and more complete equipment is strong in theory and technique, but, lacking the pressure of need, it is

apt to foster a dilettante attitude toward work. The training received in the home is primarily determined by actual need, and is put to immediate use. Along with it go the stimulation of useful achievement, and right ideas of the value and dignity of work.

Another educational advantage of the home is in the cultivation of altruism. The tendency of the school system is mainly individualistic. In the school the child himself is the center of interest. The teachers, the buildings, the equipment exist for his benefit. The course of instruction aims chiefly at preparing him for competition with his fellows. But in every rightly organized home the child is not the center, but a subordinate part. Moreover the urgent needs of the home, especially where no servants are employed, make constant appeals to altruism, and provide ideal conditions for putting it constantly into practice.

A third educational advantage of the home is in the teaching of religion. The essence of religion is an intent on the part of the individual to subordinate himself to the society of which Christ is Head; and the aim of religious education is to build up gradually in the mind of the child, to be ready formed against the time when his own developing nature will demand an ideal, the elements of this supreme intent. To accomplish this there must be depth and unity of



conviction, the influence of example, and freedom of expression. With respect to all these conditions the home has a natural superiority over the school.

The school is strong in teaching technique, but weak in teaching industry; strong in cultivating individuality, but weak in cultivating altruism; strong in perfecting the powers, but weak in perfecting the intent; in a word, strong in providing sharp tools, but weak in the building of character. In all these points where the school is weak, the home is naturally strong.

Work an Essential Factor

These natural educational advantages of the home all flow either directly or indirectly from the need of bringing the children into the work. Two or three generations ago, when the country was poor and the industrial system crude, this need was nearly universal. But in recent years the progress of large-scale production by factory and farm has greatly narrowed the field of home industry, and in prosperous homes where servants are employed the need for bringing the children into the work has been almost entirely taken away. These new conditions have resulted in a serious educational loss, especially in the families of the prosperous class.

The Purpose of Our Experiment

In view of these facts we set before ourselves the purpose of adapting our home to modern

conditions, so as to bring out again and develop to the utmost the natural superiority of the home in the sphere of character-building.

Saving the Work for Education

In order to realize this purpose the first requisite was to rescue from the hireling system a sufficient amount of work to serve as a home industry. At first we thought that a compromise might be effected, letting one of our two servants go, and reserving a special area of work for education. But as long as even one servant resided in the house, the children rebelled against work. We found that the systems of hired and voluntary service did not work well side by side. There was a psychological repugnance between them, just as there was between slave and free labor; and as slavery in the South nearly drove out free labor, so hired service in our house tended to paralyze voluntary service. It became then a question of dispensing entirely with hired servants residing in the house, and restricting hired service by the hour to such small proportions as would not paralyze voluntary work by the family.

Next came the problem of bringing the necessary work of the house within the compass of the family without over-burdening any member. To accomplish this we applied to our house the so-called "long-stroke small-bore"

principle, increasing as far as possible the labor-saving equipment and reducing as far as possible the necessary work. Fortunately our house was small, and a projected wing was of course abandoned. Then we introduced the following labor-saving mechanical equipment:

<i>Items</i>	<i>Approx. Cost</i>
Connection with a central steam-heating plant about two hundred yards distant, thus getting rid of the care of a furnace, banishing coal and ashes from the basement, and making more room.	\$ 800
Soft water cistern of extra large capacity, electric pump for pumping the water to an attic tank, supplying unlimited soft water, both hot and cold, all over the house	300
Stationary electric vacuum cleaner of large size in the basement, with stand-pipe from basement to attic, and hose connections on all floors.	300
Electric kitchen range	50
Fireless cooker	16
Electric dishwasher, hotel size, with capacity of about seven hundred pieces per hour	210
Extra dishes and silverware, to permit dishwashing once in two days . . .	85
Double-deck wheel tray	11
Total	<u>\$1772</u>

By referring to the accompanying diagram and photographs it will be seen that the plan of the kitchen, pantry, dining-room and porch has been designed with the aim of securing maximum efficiency. One side of the kitchen has in it everything relating to the preparation of food: electric range with utensils, fireless cooker, vegetable sink, pantry, work-table. Because of no heat or dust the pantry has no door, and open shelves to a large extent take the place of cupboards. Thus a person standing in the central space can reach everything required in the preparation of food with a minimum of effort. The other side of the kitchen has in it everything used in cleaning up after a meal: dish-washer, utensils for dishwashing, shelves for dishes, wheel tray; and the lines of travel from the dining-room or porch to the dishwashing department do not cross the space reserved for the preparation of food. The porch adjoining the kitchen is used in summer as an outdoor dining-room. As it is completely screened no screen door, which would interfere with free passage between kitchen and porch, is needed.

A very considerable practical help, though by no means necessary to the success of the plan, is the fact that our house is situated within two hundred yards of a Club Restaurant, where in emergencies we can obtain our meals. We

regularly go to this restaurant for our Sunday dinner.

Duties Must Be Made Attractive

An essential part of the plan is to make all the duties of the home as attractive and wholesome as possible. The fact that the vacuum cleaner, electric range, and dishwasher reduce dust, heat and drudgery, is as important as the fact that they expedite the work. It is a fortunate circumstance that transportation, which by means of an automobile can be made attractive, is such a large element in the necessary work of the home.

The walls of our kitchen are of Keene cement, tinted the color of sunlight, and the woodwork is finished in white enamel. The windows are large, and the ventilation perfect. It is in fact fully as attractive as any room in the house.

An important factor in making work attractive is working with others. Work done alone is often drudgery, when the same work done by storm in "bees" is attractive. Association of the family puts into housework some of the *esprit de corps* that makes business so irresistibly attractive.

Operating Expenses

The cost of running the house and providing the table varies so much with the varying circumstances and desires of different families, that

it is difficult to present any comparisons which are of much value. The increased cost for interest on investment, and for repairs and depreciation, is more than offset by the saving in the wages and waste of servants, and our records show that the expense of the new plan is somewhat less than the old. This is allowing nothing for the educational value of the new plan. If an allowance is made of the amount which any family would gladly pay to a school for the domestic science training alone, to say nothing of the moral and spiritual results, the comparison in favor of the new plan would be overwhelming.

Objections

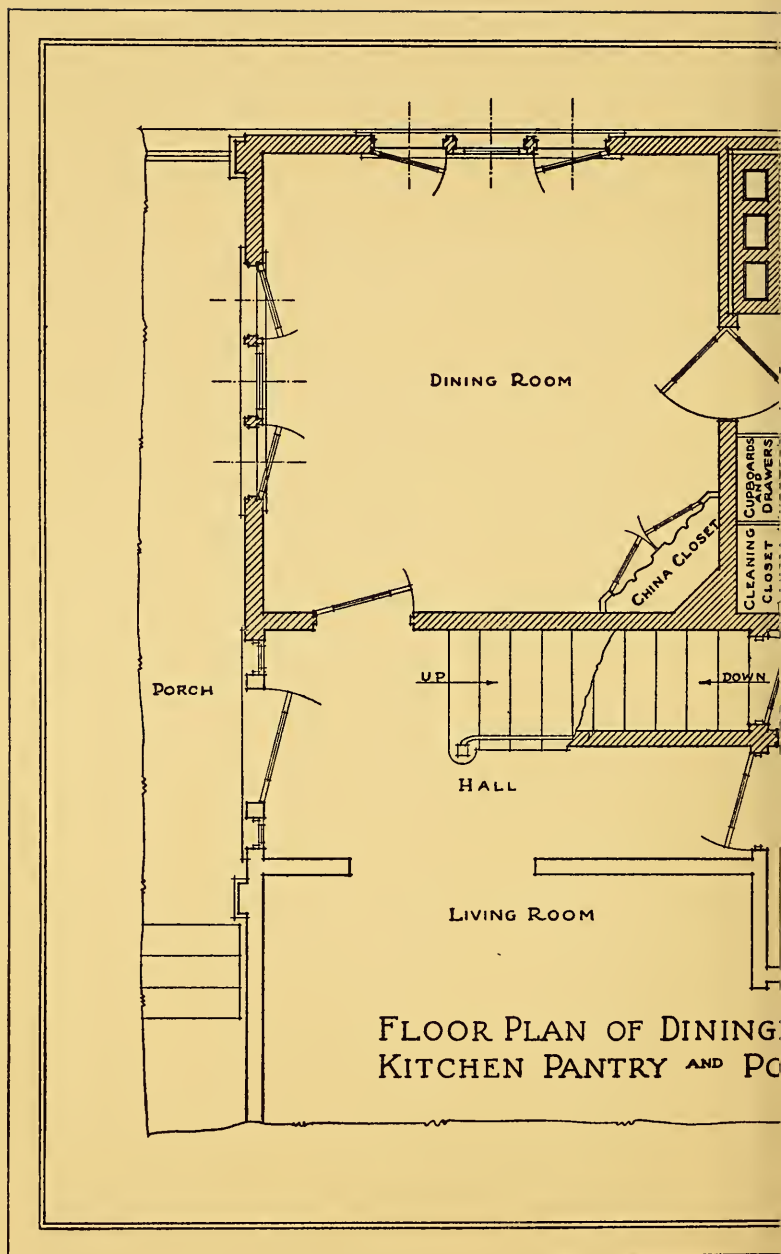
It might be objected that with a servantless house the father and mother would find it more difficult to leave home. Our experience has been the reverse. Whenever we have occasion to leave home, we secure the services of a trained nurse competent to care for the children and manage the house. We give her the option of getting the meals at home with the help of the children, or going to the Club Restaurant. As a matter of fact the efficiency and attractiveness of the kitchen are such that the nurse has always elected to have the meals at home.

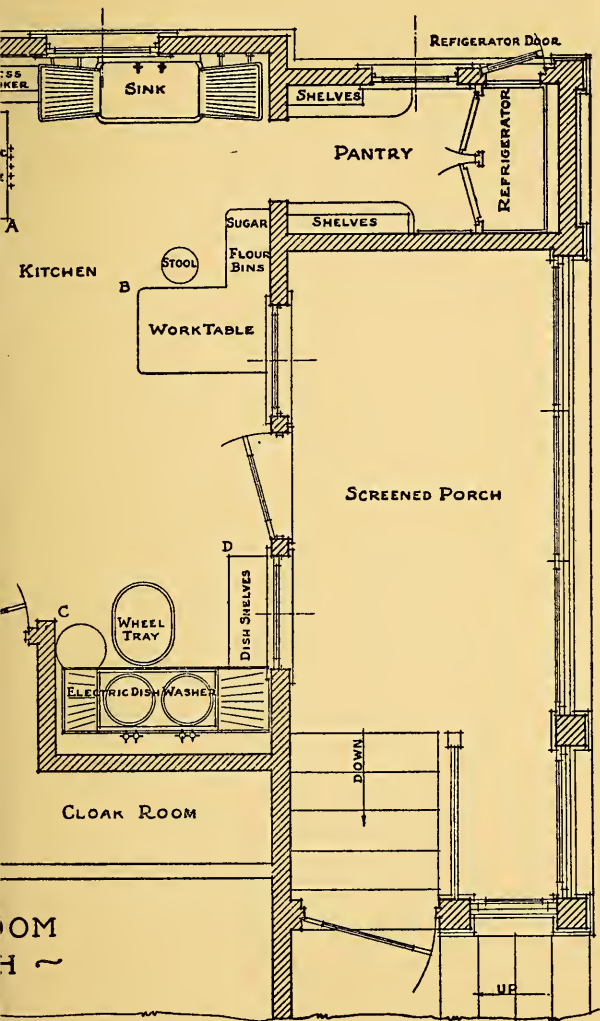
Some one will say: Do not the children break, spill, and injure a great deal in the process of learning? We answer: Yes, at the outset;

but they very quickly learn to avoid it. And after all what higher use can these material things be put to than cultivating skill, endurance, efficiency, and a spirit of service for use in adult life? People are willing to pay large sums for artificial education in schools. Why not spend a little in the form of breakage for real education in the home?

Again some might think that a child for health's sake ought to spend all his time aside from school out-of-doors. They forget that one of the most vital factors in health, along with good food, fresh air, and sleep, is the sense of achievement. To be driven out-of-doors for health's sake with nothing to do may be actually depressing to the health; while useful activity a part of the day in the house is stimulating and beneficial. A child who helps in the house according to the plan proposed has plenty of time left for out-of-doors, and after work is done there is greater zest, and therefore greater benefit in play.

Another objector will ask: Does not the domestic training of the children in addition to the regular house work with no servants to help throw a heavy burden on the mother? We answer: No. The burden is minimized by the enormous efficiency of the mechanical equipment, and by the co-operation of the other members of the family. It is also growing





steadily less, since the children are all the time gaining in the power and will to help. Besides the extra burden is far more than offset by the improvement in health which is almost certain to result from the plan.

To some perhaps the need of co-operation on the part of the father would seem an objection. To us, however, this is another mark of the rightness of the plan. One reason why the home is so backward in its development is the fact that the father has not in the past co-operated enough. With the help of highly trained specialists he has marvelously organized the factory and the office, but too often he has left the mother with the help only of ignorant servants to fight a losing battle against the appalling complexities of the home. In the factory and office money is spent like water for labor-saving machinery; in the home nearly every process is still done laboriously by hand. In the factory and office the work is so arranged that the father can take regular vacations; in the home utter chaos reigns, if the mother steps out from under even for a day. The results of this lack of co-operation are seen in the numberless mothers who are broken down and discouraged at the time of life when they ought to be in the prime of health and power. The home needs the benefit of the father's training and experience; and it is surprising how little co-operation on his part is re-

quired to bring into the home the *esprit de corps* that makes work attractive, and the scientific management that makes work efficient.

The experiment described in the foregoing pages has been in operation in our family for two and a half years, and the results thus far have more than justified our expectations. Not only have the more obvious results been attained, but as time has passed many incidental advantages have appeared.

Practical Training

No one could question the value of the practical training which is provided by this plan. The children accommodate themselves as a matter of course to the exigencies of a servantless home, the amount of compulsion required being no more than is necessary to prepare for life. The pressure of actual need gives to the work the highest degree of utility. To occupy the children with "busy-work" and hire the real work done is feeding the children on skim-milk and giving to hirelings the rich cream. Our little daughter of four, while enthusiastically polishing teaspoons on the porch one day, called out to every passing playmate: "Oh! Come and see me! I am doing real work!" We have been told that the domestic science department in our universities is seriously hampered by the fact that both faculty and students are conscious

that the work is "make-believe." This skim-milk diet of "busy-work" instead of real work causes much of the difficulty in profitably and happily occupying children at home. It causes many parents to turn helplessly to summer camps and summer schools as a means of caring for their boys and girls during vacations. They are blind to the fact that the home itself holds by far the greater resources. They throw away the precious opportunity vacations offer to increase comradeship with their children.

This training in the practical affairs of life must be begun early, if it is to be successful. Parents sometimes tell us that their daughters have no taste for cooking, and cannot be drawn into it. The reason in most cases is that the psychologic moment for imparting that particular training has been allowed to slip by unimproved. A child that is in the stage of making mud-pies will jump at the chance to make a real cake, and will take patiently a great deal of showing. The "sand-bed" age is the time for beginning practice in cooking.

One valuable effect of early training in industry is a true appreciation of labor saving. If the spilling of a pitcher of cream means only extra work for a servant, a child will go obliviously to school without learning the lesson of greater carefulness; but if the child knows what the occurrence means in terms of work, there will be

definite improvement from that day forth. In a family with sons instead of daughters the training would naturally take a different form, but in any case it would be exactly what was needed to prepare the children to be in adult life not consumers merely, but producers.

Effect on Health

The simplicity and regularity of life rendered necessary on this plan work in the direction of better health for the entire family. Time would fail for preparation of elaborate courses and rich desserts, and accordingly a simple, wholesome diet must be the rule; and the succession of necessary duties compels regularity of life. In a prosperous home with servants simplicity and regularity of life are not necessary, and the difficulty of providing these healthful conditions in their homes parents have often given as a reason for sending their children away at a tender age to boarding-schools.

Many persons lacking manual work take up sport as a duty. The resulting benefit to health is less than half what it should be. The manual work of a servantless home gives all the exercise needed for health, and allows sport to be sought for sport's sake. On this plan work and sport each on its own account contributes to the health.

The alternation of manual and mental work results in a well-balanced life. How many fami-

lies one sees in which the mother, struggling with spiritual and mental perplexities, is driven into neurasthenia, while the physical labor intended by nature as a healthful counterpoise is performed by servants. On the plan proposed the manual and mental work counterbalance each other, and each contributes its share of benefit to the health.

Cultivation of Altruism

A servantless home of the kind suggested tends to cultivate altruism by a constant appeal to the spirit of service. The work required is for the urgent needs of the home, and the motive is not primarily the perfection of the child's powers, but the helping of others. To acquire the habit of regarding the feelings and wishes of others takes practice, the same as any other habit. Could a person play the Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue of Bach without practice from childhood? Yet too often a boy is handed his university diploma, and told that he must be a public-spirited citizen, when up to that moment all his practice has been building up selfishness. Food, clothing, a beautiful home, recreation, travel, schooling, all have come to him through the efforts of others, and nothing has been required of him in return. When he finally enters upon his career the world expects him to be public-spirited, and makes no more allowance for lack of

practice in public spirit than wind and water do for lack of practice in swimming.

Then, too, this plan appeals to altruism in its most natural form, which is a regard for the feelings and wishes of those whom we love. If our immediate wants are ministered to by servants, who are paid for their pains, there is small chance for altruistic feelings to develop. Under the servant regime our children gave little heed to accidents which caused extra work: the servant was there to attend to it, and she was paid for the trouble. But under the new regime, when one of the children tore her dress just as she was starting for school, she said: "Oh, Mother! Save the porch for me to do after school!" She sensed the extra work made necessary by the accident, and wanted to be sure that it would not fall on her mother.

A child who grows up under the servant system often unconsciously develops a mercenary, anti-social feeling toward servants and the laboring class in general. Almost unavoidably he forms wrong ideas of caste, sets up in imagination a false aristocracy based on money and leisure, and is cut off from sympathy with the toiling masses. In a servantless home there is a common bond with all who are doing the world's work.

One incidental advantage of the "long-stroke small-bore" house is that each child must share a room with a brother or a sister. This means

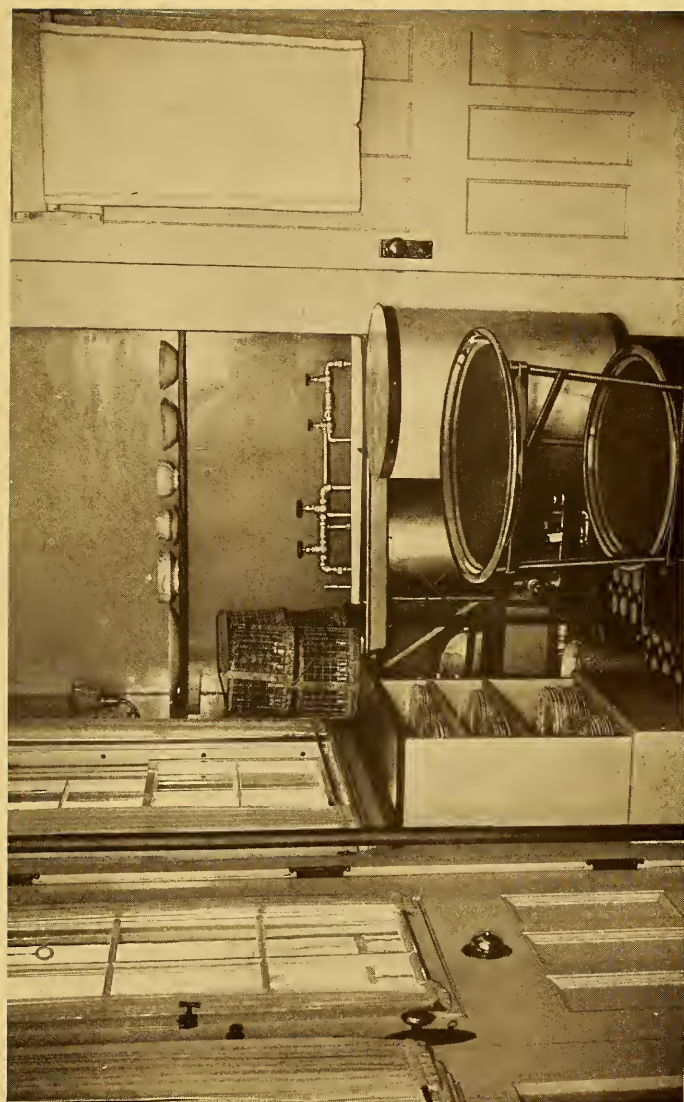
constant practice in altruism. The child who occupies a room alone, with master-pieces of art on the walls, with a perfectly appointed bathroom adjoining, with every touch of comfort that wealth can give, is a beggar compared with the little girl who shares a room with her sister, and is learning to make self-sacrificing adjustments of desires to those of another.

Moral Muscle

Not long ago in one of our larger universities three students within two weeks committed suicide. The cause was probably a lack of practice in meeting difficulties, which sooner or later are sure to come in every life. A youth who has never been trained in childhood to meet heroically whatever situation life presents is suddenly brought face to face with some great sorrow, disappointment, or responsibility. His will collapses, and he tries to evade the inevitable. A child who bears his part in a servantless home is getting daily practice from babyhood in meeting and overcoming life's difficulties, and the moral muscle thus acquired will carry him triumphantly through the inevitable struggles of later life.

Religious Education

We have found that a servantless home lends itself in an unexpected manner to religious education. We had tried various plans for effecting



the daily study of the Bible, but for one reason or another all had failed. A session of Bible study at the breakfast table, with the "destructive listening" of a maid waiting to put the dining-room in order, was certainly not held under ideal conditions; and a session at any other time meant artificial assembling, and the overcoming of inertia. After the servants left and we came into the complete possession of our own home, we easily fell into the way of taking a few minutes each morning after breakfast for reading the Bible. In these studies we are careful to follow the spirit of the occasion. Sometimes after a very brief reading we will separate with no discussion. At other times a question will be asked by one of the children, which will lead us to close the Bible, and devote an hour to discussion. In this way some of the stumbling-blocks to faith are being removed, and a religious conception of life is being formed in the minds of our children.

Formation of Right Ideals

The plan proposed helps in the formation of right ideals. Instruction given once a week at Sunday-school and church often quickly fades away, partly because it is not spontaneously sought, and partly because it is not sufficiently correlated with action. For the same reason much of the formal instruction given in the

ordinary home amounts to little. If you should say to yourself: "Tomorrow morning at nine o'clock I will sit down with my children, and give them correct ideas about dancing," the chances are ten to one that little impression would be made. But if you are spending several hours each day associating with your children in the duties and pleasures of the home, you will find numberless occasions when the true ideals of life can be given in response to their own spontaneous seeking. The daily and hourly needs and contacts of a servantless home provide unsurpassed conditions for imparting truth at the psychologic moment—the moment when it is desired, asked for, and imperatively needed for immediate use. Truth imparted under these conditions enters directly into a child's ideals, and is woven permanently into his character.

Solves the Servant Problem

Another happy, though quite incidental result of this way of living is its solution of the servant problem. Occasionally in conversation with friends we are reminded that the servant problem is still chronic in most families of the prosperous class; otherwise we should hardly know that such a problem existed. With proper treatment machinery never answers back, and never goes on strike. Nor is it ever so happy, so to speak, as when performing its appointed task.

Constant practice in work brings increase of faculty, and less dread of emergencies; while in a family with servants there is deterioration of faculty and consequent dependence more and more abject. In a servantless home there is no haunting fear that the servants may leave. The life of the family is not constantly followed by envious eyes, irate voices, and discontented looks. The conscience is not disturbed by the lurking thought that elegance and leisure based on labor requited by social degradation is unethical. Yet if the house is highly organized and equipped, it is like the little silver cask which "Mr. Wind" gave to "John Peter" in the story: Struck with the magic wand of service, its treasures open, and all reasonable wants are joyfully and efficiently ministered to by the tiny elves Electricity and Machinery.

Strengthens the Family

Providing for the needs of their children is in the order of nature a common bond between parents. But in artificial homes where the physical needs of the children are attended to by servants, and their educational needs are indiscriminately placed upon the school, this common bond is to a large extent lost. What wonder then that in such homes the father and mother after a few years often begin to draw apart! The purpose of developing the natural educa-

tional advantages of the home gives to the father and mother an absorbing common interest, and thus adds strength to the family.

To say in conclusion that the type of home we have described is a happy home is merely to repeat in a word what has already been said. There is some sacrifice in leisure and luxury, which can well be spared; there is a gain in education, health, and economic efficiency, which are indispensable. That the net result must be an increase of happiness is self-evident. Every home that sacrifices non-essentials for the sake of education has in it a source of happiness as permanent as the need for improvement of character.



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